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## **PRESS CLIPPINGS**

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***September 24, 2005***

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### **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE #12 (SO12)**

**(Conflict Reduced in Mindanao and Other Areas Vulnerable to Violence)**

#### **Mindanao students gain access to info**

**(Source: Malaya Internet Edition – 9/24/05)**

NORTH COTABATO – In the small town of Kabacan, known as the site of intermittent clashes between government troops and elements of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), parents, students, teachers, and community organizations have turned to education, the most useful tool for attaining sustainable peace and development.

In an effort to improve low literary levels and encourage private and public sector organizations to invest in education improvement, representatives from universities, local government, and the private sector convened for a "Culture of Reading" workshop at the University of Southern Mindanao (USM) in Kabacan, North Cotabato.

The workshop is being sponsored by the Education Awareness Support Effort (EASE), a component of USAID's Growth with Equity in Mindanao 2 (GEM2) Program.

Jo-Ann de Belen, EASE manager said the workshop is designed to establish a culture of reading in schools and communities in the region as well as train teacher-librarians who can manage and circulate books acquired through USAID's Matching Grant Program (MGP). EASE matching grants have assisted over 150 schools throughout Mindanao.

"Aside from enabling EASE partner schools to expand their library holdings, the workshop is also designed to elicit the interest and commitment of local government units to improve the quality of education," de Belen added.

Administrators of at least 40 schools in Cotabato, Maguindanao, Sarangani, and Sultan Kudarat, 15 government officials, and 47 teacher-librarians discussed topics such as the local school board's role in developing a culture of reading in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and other conflict-affected areas; the library as hub of reading activity; DepEd's vision for English literacy in Mindanao; and accessing books from the Books for Philippine Schools Foundation, Inc. (BPSFI). Lectures on managing book collections, descriptive cataloguing and classification, and maximizing the use of the books will also be presented to teacher-librarians.

The poor quality of education has exacted a heavy toll on the development of the region, particularly in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and other conflict-affected areas. At a recent Educator's Congress as mentioned by ARMM Governor Parouk Hussin noted that increased private sector support is the key to improving the quality of education in the region. The EASE Program is one of several initiatives to engage the private sector to improve education in the ARMM.

EASE establishes partnerships with Parent-Teacher-Community-Associations (PTCAs) to fund various education enhancement activities that can be achieved by purchase of the following: library books, Reading and English learning materials, Science laboratory equipment and supplies.

The workshop was organized by the GEM 2 Program with BPSFI and Above Publishing House Inc. as its parents. BPSFI is the counterpart of the California-based non-governmental organization, "Books for the Barrios" that donates textbooks, reference and popular books, as well as teaching materials to public elementary and high schools in the Philippines. Abiva, is a leading publisher of books for both students and teachers from preschool to high school.

Resource people for the workshop included writer, essayist, playwright and columnist for the Philippine Star Isagani Cruz, GEM Deputy program manager for Education and Governance Michael Langsdorf, Grace Albarida, teacher librarian of BPSI Model of Excellence School Estaban Abada Elementary School, and Emeline Doruelo, Reading Consultant of Abiva Publishing House.